

OBSERVANCE OF VIETNAM VETERAN'S WEEK 1979

DCI's Remarks
Friday, 1 June 1979

Good afternoon. I think it is very fitting that we here at the Agency take these few moments to join in national recognition of the Vietnam Veteran's Week and remember those countrymen and women who served in that conflict area.

I think there is a particular bond between the Agency and the military in this respect. Over 2,000 of our present employees served in Vietnam in military uniform. But even more importantly, over 2,200 CIA employees themselves served the Agency in Vietnam--1,100 of them still being on service with us-- and served in Vietnam, of course, shoulder to shoulder with the United States military. And, as a result, today we honor the Armed Forces in Vietnam Veteran's Week but we equally honor our Agency employees who served there with equal distinction. And I think it is appropriate we do this recognition here because out of that common experience in Vietnam, we have some very special links together with the military veterans.

To begin with, the Vietnam conflict, as we all recognize, is one of the most divisive political experiences in the history of our country or any country. There was between the individuals in our country no great agreement on whether we should or should not have been involved in Vietnam. The military were no different than the rest of the population. They were divided in their individual views on the desirability of fighting in that war.

But collectively, the military in a democratic society must be apolitical. It cannot take sides. It must make its views known and then, when a political decision is made, it must carry out its orders. The United States military did that, and did it to the best of its ability in Vietnam.

But there is the special link with us in the Agency because we can particularly appreciate that ethic. It is not unlike the responsibility we shoulder. Our personal views of what the nation's policy should be in the countries where we operate must be subordinated in the long run to the national view and the national policy that our political leaders decide. Our actions overseas, particularly of course, in the covert action area, must be dictated by the national policy.

There is still a second area in which we have much in common with the military and their experience in Vietnam. And that is that the United States military was sent to Vietnam to fight a war under a set of ground rules which, virtually, precluded winning. Winning is important to Americans. Winning is particularly important to the military man. It is the only real test of all his preparation, all his training and thinking. It is the single objective behind the military machine. With that goal removed in Vietnam it was, of course, a very frustrating experience for many of our military personnel.

We here in the Agency can sympathize and share that also because we, too, are professionals. We, too, are honorable people. We, too, are people who want to do the job; in our sense, want to win. We, too, have seen, particularly in the post-Vietnam era, what seemed

to us to be unnecessary, undesirable restrictions and restrictive micro-management placed upon us. So, again, we have something in common with these Vietnam veterans we honor this week.

Finally, we have in common the fact that the citizens of our country who opposed the Vietnam war came to realize that the most obvious symbol of their opposition, of their resistance to what the government was doing, was the military man in uniform. The uniform in the military became something of an embarrassment in that time, a target of scorn. And I found that young military personnel were shunning their uniforms when not required to wear them. But far more serious than that even, the military men who were lucky enough to come home from Vietnam--some of them badly wounded--found that they came home to a country that was divided, a country that was going to criticize what they had done and that for which they had sacrificed, rather than praise them which, of course, is our tradition for the military man who has fought for his country and perhaps sacrificed on the battlefield.

I have a particularly poignant personal experience in that regard because one of my closest friends was a prisoner of war for seven and a half years and came home physically maimed. And yet, came home to make an adjustment from a country which, when he left it and went into prison camp, was still generally supporting this war which had really just begun and when he came back, was very divided and unflattering as to those who had participated in it. A terribly wrenching experience for a dedicated American who had sacrificed so much physically and mentally for his country. Never before in the history of our country have our patriots been treated thus.

And so, too, we in the Agency have much in common here because, I am afraid, we can appreciate and understand this unfortunate lack of appreciation and understanding by a country for what are necessary, honorable, and dedicated sacrifices that we, as an Agency, have made over the years and which have been subject to undue and unnecessary criticism.

Let us remember then that as we honor the Vietnam veterans, we honor also the Agency veterans of Vietnam and we recognize that together we have much in common in recognizing the similarities between the problems the military had in Vietnam and the basic ethics and responsibilities that govern our lives here in the Central Intelligence Agency.

America is a great country, not because of the strength of our military or even our economic prowess, but because of the strength of Americans like those military men and women who served in Vietnam and like those Agency men and women who served there with them. Let us be grateful that we had their service in such dedication and such abundance. Thank you.

SUBJECTS:

1 JUNE 1979

VIETNAM VETERANS WEEK

Adm. TURNER'S ADDRESS

Hqs. Auditorium